

**Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments**  
**Appropriations Hearing**  
**HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
**Department of Housing**  
**Wednesday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**Stephanie Boyce**  
**Program Manager**  
**Hands On Hartford**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 5037 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023). I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Stephanie Boyce and I work in Hartford and am a resident of Middletown.

I currently work at Hands On Hartford, a nonprofit that has been around for 53 years providing food, housing assistance and health support to the community as the manager of Homeless Prevention and Outreach programs. We, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for permanent housing for all of Connecticut's residents was made even more important.

**I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing (DOH):**

- I support the preservation of DOH's following FY23 allocations:
  - \$2.935 million Homeless Youth line
  - \$85.323 million Housing/Homeless Services line
  - \$637K Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
  - \$100 million bond authorization for the Affordable Housing FLEX Fund and \$50 million bond authorization for the state Housing Trust Fund
- I support an additional \$2.3 million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to provide critical staff infrastructure support to Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) and 2-1-1. CANs provide streamlined access to the homeless services system at the regional level. 2-1-1 serves as the statewide single point of entry to CANs.
- I support an increase to DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line by at least \$20 million in FY23 to expand the Rental Assistance Program (RAP), including \$2 million to provide rental assistance to 200 scattered-site supportive housing units for highly vulnerable individuals and families.
- I support an additional \$2.5 million in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services line to establish and implement a proven eviction prevention model that leverages Right to Counsel legal services and couples them with high-quality social work to address vulnerable renter's needs.
- I support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations

- I also support providing an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (\$8.08 million at DOH and \$5.26 million at DMHAS) to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology via:
  - \$7.47 million increase in DOH Housing/Homeless Services line
  - \$169K increase in DOH Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
  - \$436K increase in DOH Homeless Youth line

**Additionally,** I support the governor's proposed allocation of \$50 million in American Rescue Plan recovery funds to support the creation of 350 additional housing units affordable to households with incomes between 30% and 50% of area median income.

I have been providing direct services in Hartford for nine years. During the course of the pandemic, we have seen an increase in Opioid addiction, untreated mental health and individuals remaining and entering into homelessness. In December of 2020, the Greater Hartford Outreach Program was formed. It is a collaboration between Hands On Hartford, CT Harm Reduction Alliance and Wheeler clinic. In one year alone, the outreach team received 802 referrals. 435 individuals and families were verified as experiencing literal homelessness, 265 of those individuals/families were placed into shelter, which is a huge step toward housing. The team goes out in the evenings to various woods, shopping centers, streets, in Hartford and 29 surrounding towns to find individuals who are experiencing homelessness. These statistics alone tell us that homelessness is real here in the state of Connecticut. We have to do better as a state. We must begin to understand that Housing is a right not a luxury.

During the summer of 2021, the team found Rebecca, 33 years old, who was sleeping at a bus stop in East Hartford. Rebecca was known as an individual who was experiencing homelessness and accessed area resources for shelter and food. When the team met with Rebecca, she asked for help getting into shelter. The team was able to place her into shelter and provided her with transportation. She continued to stay in shelter through the summer and fall and worked on a housing plan and became connected to health supports. She also accessed our community meal day program and shared that she was working with shelter staff. In October of 2021, she was finally matched to permanent supportive housing. She was beyond excited and so were we! Many individuals who are experiencing homelessness are not connected to medical care as their worry is how they are going to survive the night outside.

There are more Rebecca's out there in our community, waiting for access to safe, affordable housing, wanting to connect with people that care and to know that even though they are experiencing homelessness, they matter.

**Homelessness is solvable.** Connecticut can make homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time experience by investing in what works: housing, supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut's future beyond the pandemic— it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

  
**Stephanie Boyce**  
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